The Wooden Eagle

A Russian Fairy Tale

The Mir Titles Project

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In a certain kingdom, in a certain land, there lived a tsar. The tsar had many servants. They were not simple helpers, but skilled craftsmen of all kinds: carpenters, potters, and tailors. The tsar liked his clothes to be sewn better than anyone else's, his dishes to be painted more cleverly, and his palace to be decorated with fine carving.

There were so many craftsmen in the royal palace that you could not count them. Every morning they gathered at the palace entrance and waited to see what work the tsar would give them for the day.

Once it happened that a goldsmith and a carpenter bumped into each other at the palace door. They bumped into each other and began to argue about who knew his craft better and whose work was harder.

The goldsmith said: "You do not have much skill. You sit working with wood and carve wooden things. My work is quite different: I make everything from pure gold — a joy to look at."

The carpenter replied: “It is not hard to make an expensive thing when gold itself is valuable. You try making something wonderful out of plain wood, so that everyone around is amazed. Then I will believe you are a true master.”
They argued and argued, and almost came to blows. Just then the tsar entered. He heard their talk, smiled to himself, and gave an order: “Make something curious for me, both of you: one from gold, the other from wood. I shall look at them and decide which of you is the better master.”

One dœs not argue with the tsar if one values one’s life. So the craftsmen left the palace, each going his own way. Both thought hard about how to outdo the other in skill.

The tsar gave them one week.

A week later, both masters came to the palace. They stood in a line with the others and waited for the tsar to appear.

Each of them held a bundle in his hands.

The tsar came out and said: “Well then, lads, show me your skill.”

And he smiled quietly into his beard. He ordered that the tsarina and his young son, the tsarevich, be called into the chamber as well. “Let them look at your work too.”

The tsar and the tsarina sat down on a bench, and

the tsarevich stood beside them. The goldsmith stepped forward.

"Order, dear father tsar, that a large tub of water be brought."

They brought a large tub and filled it with water.

The master untied his bundle, took out a golden duck, and set it on the water. The duck swam as if it were alive: it turned its head, quacked, and cleaned its feathers with its beak.

The tsar opened his mouth in amazement, and the tsarina cried out: "Why, this is a living duck, not a golden one! He must have covered a real duck with gold!"

The master was offended. "How can it be alive? Order me to take it apart piece by piece and put it together again with screws."

He took the duck out of the tub, first unscrewed its wings, then its head, and then took it completely to pieces. He laid the parts out on the table and began to screw them together again. When he finished, he

set it on the water. The duck swam even better than before.

All the courtiers clapped their hands: "What a master! What a marvel! We have never seen anything like this!"

The tsar turned to the carpenter: "Now you show your skill."

The carpenter bowed. "Order, Your Majesty, that the window in this chamber be opened."

They opened the window. The carpenter unwrapped

his bundle and took out a wooden eagle. It was made so well that it could not be told from a living one. And the carpenter said:

"The golden duck can only swim on water, but my eagle can rise into the clouds."

The carpenter sat on the eagle and turned a little screw. The eagle lifted him up and in a moment flew through the air out of the royal chamber.

Everyone rushed to the windows and looked on with open mouths. The carpenter flew above the palace courtyard, making circles in the air. When he turned the screw to the left, the eagle flew down; when he

turned it to the right, it rose higher. From amazement, the tsar's crown slipped back on his head. He stared out of the window and could not look away. Everyone around stood as if frozen.

No one had ever seen such skill before.

The carpenter circled in the air and then flew back into the chamber. He set the eagle aside and went up to the tsar.

"Well, dear father tsar, are you pleased with my skill?"

"I have no words, I am so pleased," replied the tsar. "But how did you manage it? And how did you fix that little screw to it?"

The carpenter began to explain it to the tsar. At that moment the tsarina suddenly gasped and cried out:

"Where are you going? Where? Ah, catch him, stop him!"

Everyone turned at her cry and saw this: while the tsar was questioning the carpenter, the young tsarevich had jumped onto the eagle, turned the screw, and flown out of the window into the courtyard.

"Come back at once! Where are you going? You will be killed!" the tsar and tsarina shouted to him. But the tsarevich waved his hand and flew over the silver fence that surrounded the palace. He turned the screw to the right, and the eagle rose above the clouds and disappeared from sight.

The tsarina fell down senseless, and the tsar grew

angry with the carpenter.

"This," he said, "you invented on purpose, to destroy our only son. Guards! Seize him and throw him into the dungeon. And if the tsarevich dœs not return in two weeks, hang the carpenter on the gallows."

The guards seized the carpenter and threw him into a dark underground prison.

And the tsarevich on the wooden eagle flew farther and farther away.

The tsarevich enjoyed it. All around was wide and free.

The wind whistled in his ears, his curls streamed back, clouds rushed beneath his feet, and the tsarevich himself was like a winged bird. Wherever he wished, he turned in the sky.

By evening he flew into an unknown kingdom and came down at the edge of a city. He saw a small hut standing there.

The tsarevich knocked on the door. An old woman looked out.

"Let me stay the night, grandmother. I am a stranger here, I know no one, and I have nowhere to stay."

"Why should I not let you in, my son? Come in, there is plenty of room. I live alone."

The tsarevich unscrewed the eagle, tied it into a bundle, and went into the old woman's hut.

The old woman began to feed him supper, and the tsarevich asked her about the city, who lived in it, and what marvels there were in the city.

Then the old woman said: "There is one wonder in our land, my son."
In the middle of the city stands the royal palace, and beside the palace there is a tall tower. That tower is locked with thirty locks, and its gates are guarded by thirty guards.

No one is allowed into that tower. The king's daughter lives there. From the day she was born, she was shut in that tower with her nurse, so that no one might see her. The king and queen fear that the princess might fall in love with someone, and then they would have to give her in marriage to a foreign land. They would be sorry to part with her, for she is their only child. So the girl lives in the tower like a prisoner.

"And is the princess really beautiful?" the tsarevich asked.

"I do not know, my son, I have not seen her myself," said the old woman, "but people say that such beauty cannot be found anywhere else in the world."

The tsarevich longed to make his way into the forbidden tower. He lay down to sleep, but he kept thinking about how he might see the princess.

The next day, when it grew dark, he sat on his wooden eagle, rose up into the clouds, and flew to the tower, to the side where there was a window in the chamber.

He flew up and knocked on the glass.

The princess was amazed. She saw a young man of indescribable beauty.

"Who are you, kind young man?" she asked.

"Open the window. I will tell you everything at

once."

The girl opened the window, and the wooden eagle flew into the room. The tsarevich stepped down from it, greeted her, and told the girl who he was and how he had come there.

They sat there looking at one another and could not look enough.

The tsarevich asked whether she would agree to become his wife.

"I would agree," said the princess, "but I fear my father and mother will not let me go."

But the wicked nurse, who watched over the princess, had seen everything. She ran to the palace and reported that someone had flown to the princess, and that this young man was now hiding in the old woman's house.

The guards soon ran in, seized the tsarevich, and dragged him to the palace. There the tsar sat on his throne, angry, banging his club on the floor.

"How did you, you scoundrel and robber, dare to break my royal order? Tomorrow I shall have you executed!"

They led the tsarevich to the dungeon, threw him inside alone, and locked it with strong locks.

In the morning all the people were driven to the square. It was announced that the daring young man who had entered the princess's tower would be put to death.

The executioner had already arrived, the gallows had been set up, and the tsar and tsarina themselves came to watch the execution.

They led the tsarevich out into the square. He turned to the tsar and said:

"Your Majesty, allow me to make one last request."

The tsar frowned, but he could not refuse. "Well, speak."

"Order a messenger to run to the old woman's house where I stayed, and bring my bundle."

The tsar could not refuse and sent a messenger. The bundle was brought.

By that time the tsarevich had already been led to the gallows and placed on the steps. The messenger handed him the bundle.

The tsarevich unwrapped it, leapt onto the wooden eagle — and was gone. He rose up above the gallows, above the tsar, and above the whole crowd.

The tsar cried out:
"Catch him! Hold him! He is flying away!"

But the tsarevich guided the eagle towards the tower,

flew to the familiar window, picked up the princess, and seated her in front of him on the eagle.

"Well," he said, "now no pursuit can frighten us."

And the eagle carried them off to the tsarevich's kingdom.

Meanwhile the poor carpenter sat in the underground prison, never taking his eyes off the sky, wondering whether the tsarevich would fly back. The next day the two weeks would end, and the carpenter would hang from the rope if the tsar's son did not return.

Suddenly he saw a wooden eagle flying through the sky, and on it the tsarevich — and not alone, but with a beautiful maiden.

The eagle came down in the middle of the royal courtyard. The tsarevich lifted his bride from it and led her to his father and mother. He told them where he had been for the two weeks. Out of joy they forgave him for all their worry and released the carpenter from the underground prison.

The tsar held a great feast. They celebrated the wedding for three months.

For children of primary school age

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